4. Loss of Baggage (500 cases only)	Actual loss subject to a maximum of SR.500/-

Shortage of Booklets in Bangalore Passport Office

1045. SHRI KB. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Bangalore Passport Office is facing a shortage of booklets; and

(b) if so, the action proposed to be taken to clear the pending of applications for passports at Bangalore Passport Office?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) There was a shortage of supply of blank passport booklets by the India Security Press, Nashik from September to December 2005. However, the supply position has improved since January 2006. Bangalore Passport Office has embarked upon a 'Pendency Clearance Drive' from 3rd February 2006 with a view to clearing the pending applications expeditiously by putting in extra hours of work.

Launch of transformational diplomacy

1046. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received any information that new American Consulates and posts in Hyderabad, Bangalore and addition of scores of officials to the US Diplomatic Corps in India is on the cards following the launch of transformational diplomacy aimed at shaping US posture in the 21st century;

(b) if so, the details thereof, and

(c) the manner in which the US decision is likely to improve Indo-US relations?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) and (b) The Government understands that the United States Government is considering opening an additional consulate in India. The matter is under examination.

(c) In view of the transformation of India-US ties and the strong

economic and people-to-people linkages, Government is of the opinion that an additional Consulate could expand India-US trade and economic relations. It will also lead to faster processing of requests for US visas and consular services and would offer increased opportunities to enter into mutually beneficial cooperation.

Safety of Haj pilgrims

1047. SHRITARIQ ANWAR: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that a large number of Indians died during the Haj this year;

(b) if so, the exact number thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the new steps proposed by Government for the safety of Haj pilgrims?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) A total of 290 Indians died during Haj 2006 as per following break-up:

(i) Due to natural causes like cardiac arrest, respiratory failure, etc.	—	217
(ii) Due to stampede	—	62
(iii) In building collapse	—	3
(iv) In road accidents	—	7
(v) In lift accident	—	1

(c) the orientation/training of pilgrims is a regular feature of Haj arrangements. Haj Committee of India, in coordination with State Haj Committees and other voluntary organizations who are involved in the Haj arrangements, has been conducting orientation camps throughout the country for prospective Haj pilgrims, with special emphasis on the performance of Haj especially on safety measures and methods to deal with emergencies such as accidents and stampedes, etc. These are explained in detail by specially trained resource persons.

Expansion of 1974 Bilateral Protocol

1048. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to refer to the reply to Unstarred Question 1723 given in the Rajya Sabha